

The 25 Best Foods For Your Heart

Eat these superfoods to your heart's content

Deborah Hastings January 22, 2013

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The healthiest food for your heart

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The healthiest food for your heart

Can the contents of your kitchen seriously save your life? A growing body of research suggests that what you eat and drink can protect your body against myriad health woes—and studies have shown that up to 70% of heart disease cases are preventable with the right food choices.

“What's good for your heart is good for your brain and good for you in general,” says Arthur Agatston, MD, a renowned cardiologist and founder of the South Beach Diet.

There's just one little trick to turning your kitchen into a hub for heart health: Don't stick to the same few foods. The secret is in varying the types of fish, vegetables, whole grains, and other items you enjoy every day. With that in mind, we've compiled the world's 25 top foods for your heart—mix and match a handful of them every week to eat your way toward a healthier you.

Wild Salmon (not farmed)

wild salmonwild salmon

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Wild Salmon (not farmed)

Broiled, grilled or baked, this tasty, fleshy fish is replete with omega-3 fatty acids that improve the metabolic markers for heart disease. It also has rich levels of selenium, an antioxidant that studies have shown boosts cardiovascular protection. (Of course, not all salmon is created equal: Find out what The Invasion Of The Frankenfish means for

your health.)

Sardines

SardinesSardines

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Sardines

These spiny little creatures are also loaded with omega-3s in the form of fish oil, which increases “good” cholesterol levels and reduces the risk of sudden heart attacks in people who have experienced previous attacks, according to the Mayo Clinic. Stick to fresh ones to avoid the canned variety's high salt content.

Liver

LiverLiver

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Liver

Liver contains fats that are good for the heart, says William Davis, MD, a Wisconsin-based preventive cardiologist and author of *Wheat Belly*. “That's the way humans are scripted,” he says. “Primitive humans ate the entire animal. Livers contain a lot of fats and that's healthy.”

Walnuts

WalnutsWalnuts

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Walnuts

This nut is chock-full of omega-3 fatty acids, fiber, Vitamin E, and folate, all of which promote healthy hearts. It's also high in polyunsaturated fats. Eat them unsalted, of course. (Walnuts are also one of the healthiest foods for diabetics. Curious about what else is? We've rounded up the Top 12 Blood Sugar-Friendly Staples.)

Almonds

AlmondsAlmonds

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Almonds

Like walnuts, these crunchy, meaty nuts are big in omega-3s, and provide an alternative to folks who may not like the bitter bite of fleshy walnuts.

Chia seeds

Chia seedsChia seeds

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Chia seeds

Just a spoonful of this plant-based omega-3 powerhouse contains only 60 calories and helps reduce bad cholesterol and plaque buildup. Mix them with yogurt, soup, or sprinkle on a salad. (Curious about the nutritional oomph of chia seeds? We've got the scoop on Chia Seed Health Benefits.)

Oatmeal

OatmealOatmeal

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Oatmeal

The highly publicized benefits of eating your oatmeal have long shown it's a wonder meal for reducing cholesterol. But eat only the plain, non-processed kind. Instant and flavored oats are often drenched in processed sugar. (Steel-cut and rolled oats are both health superfoods. Find out which one reigns supreme in our Health Food Face-Off.)

Blueberries

BlueberriesBlueberries

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Blueberries

These dark berries are packed with resveratrol (more about this powerful antioxidant later) and flavonoids, another antioxidant that helps prevent coronary disease. Put them in your oatmeal, in a smoothies, or in yogurt.

Coffee

CoffeeCoffee

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Coffee

Caffeine junkies rejoice. According to Dr. Agatston, studies have shown that coffee is high in antioxidants and reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes. Up to three cups a day also increases cognition levels and helps decrease the risk of Alzheimer's disease, Agatston says. (That's not the only thing a cup of java can do. We've got 4 More Coffee Cures that'll convince you to drink up.)

Red wine

Red wineRed wine

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Red wine

Back to the importance of resveratrol, a compound with antioxidant properties, which can also help prevent cancer, according a recent study from the UK's University of Leicester. Resveratrol is found in dark-skinned berries and grapes. Madirans and Cabernets typically contain large amounts of procyanidins, an antioxidant that helps reduce cholestrol and increases arterial health. (Wine fan? We don't blame you. Check out these 8 Reasons To Love Red Wine.)

Green tea

Green teaGreen tea

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Green tea

Lower hypertension by pouring yourself a cup of this beverage long favored by Chinese herbalists for its medicinal benefits. In its soothing warmth are catechin and flavonoids, antioxidants with multiple cardio benefits including reducing blood clots.

Soy milk

Soy milkSoy milk

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Soy milk

It's high in the organic compound isoflavones, which has been shown to help reduce cholesterol. Unlike animal milk, this beverage contains no cholesterol and is naturally low in fat. In also contains niacin, which helps boost circulation.

Dark Chocolate

Dark ChocolateDark Chocolate

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Dark Chocolate

Yes! You're not hallucinating. But pick one that contains at least 70 percent cocoa, which has been linked to lower blood pressure, because its flavonols relax arteries, and increased blood flow. Make sure it doesn't contain saturated fats from additives such as palm oil. (As if you needed another reason to indulge, we've compiled 5 Strange Ways Chocolate Keeps You Healthy.)

Raisins

RaisinsRaisins

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Raisins

Grab a handful and help reduce high blood pressure, according to a 2012 study presented to the American College of Cardiology. That's because raisins are packed with potassium, which helps lower hypertension and increases immune-boosting antioxidants.

Broccoli

BroccoliBroccoli

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Broccoli

You knew this would be on the list! This green vegetable is low in cholesterol, high in fiber, and contains a wealth of antioxidants.

Brussels sprouts

Brussels sproutsBrussels sprouts

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Brussels sprouts

Yup, this one, too. Whether you hate or love this vitamin-rich veggie that looks like mini cabbage heads, there's no disputing it is good for your heart. Among its heart-healthy benefits are reducing inflammation in the cardiovascular system and improving blood vessel health.

Cauliflower

CauliflowerCauliflower

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Cauliflower

It's not green, but it is bursting with antioxidants, is high in fiber, and contains allicin, a component of garlic shown to help lower the risk of heart attacks and reduce cholesterol. (Broccoli and cauliflower both made this list. But which one's better for you? We've got the answer.)

Yams

YamsYams

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Yams

A great source of Vitamin C, calcium, and iron, which help reduce high blood pressure. Eat the skin, too, which is full of heart-healthy nutrients.

Whole grains

Whole grainsWhole grains

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Whole grains

Dr. Agatston recommends whole grains free of glutens, including oat bran and rice, which regulate cholesterol. Avoid processed, refined grains, which are steeped in glutens that have been associated with heart ailments including clogged arteries. (Are you picking the right grains? Find out why Whole Grain Doesn't Always Mean Healthy.)

Apples

ApplesApples

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Apples

Do not peel this ubiquitous fruit—that's where all the antioxidants are, notably polyphenols, which shield cholesterol from free-radical assaults. Apples (of any color) also contain pectin, which blocks absorption of cholesterol, and fiber, which sweeps out cholesterol. The result of eating an apple a day, according to a recent study? A 40% decrease in LDL cholesterol.

Oranges

OrangesOranges

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Oranges

Another source of pectin, this citrus fruit is also packed with a flavaonoid that lowers blood pressure and reduces artery inflammation. Citrus also contains hesperidin, a plant chemical that improves blood flow to the heart, and vitamin C, a potent protector against stroke.

Grapefruit

GrapefruitGrapefruit

23/26

Grapefruit

Like oranges, grapefruit contains a lot of vitamin C which, according to research, can help protect against stroke and helps reduce cholesterol. (If you're on heart medication, Viagra, or a statin like Lipitor, stay away from this juicy breakfast food, which contains a compound that has been shown to be toxic when mixed with the above meds. Check out this piece about dangerous drug interactions for more information.)

Avocado

AvocadoAvocado

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Avocado

This fruit is loaded with monounsaturated fats, also known as “good fats” that can help minimize blood cholesterol and blood clots. But they are also high in calories (240 per average-sized avocado), so go easy.

Avocado oil

Avocado oilAvocado oil

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Avocado oil

Pressed from the fruit, avocado oil has been touted as a more heart-healthy cooking oil because of its ability to modify fatty acids in tissues around the heart. A 2005 National Institute of Cardiology study that showed the oil could decrease hardening of the arteries, which often leads to heart disease.

Olive oil

Olive oilOlive oil

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Olive oil

Make sure it's extra virgin. The purer olive oil contains higher levels of “good fat” and antioxidants to help unclog your arteries and is considerably more healthy for your heart than vegetable oil and its cholesterol-inducing “bad” fats.

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